

New Move to Save Threatened Pier

By ROBERTA B. GRATZ

After years of public pressure, the Landmarks Preservation Commission is preparing to designate the city's oldest functioning covered pier a municipal landmark, despite its scheduled demolition by a state agency.

Such designation would, in effect, save the pier from demolition but does not insure its traditional use as a fireboat station.

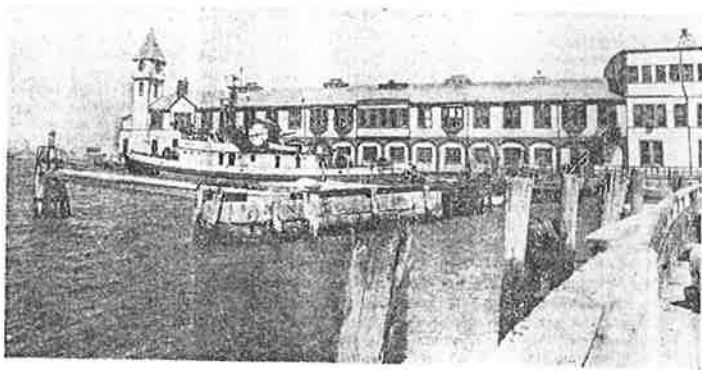
Pier A, the 1886 building at the foot of Manhattan's West Side, was designated a state and national landmark this summer. State and federal officials had approved the designation with unusual speed in an effort to persuade the Battery Park City Authority to alter longstanding plans to demolish the simple two-story, green-roof building which remains one of the few waterfront landmarks in an area once rich in maritime history.

Still in use as a fireboat station, Pier A has been scheduled for demolition by the authority since the city leased the land in 1970 to the state for development.

Requires a Study

Unlike city landmark status, national and state designations carry no legal prohibition against demolition. But destruction of a national historic site requires an impact study from the Army Corps of Engineers, which could delay plans.

The city's landmark commission has scheduled the pier for its January pub-



Pier A, at the northwest corner of Battery Park.

OCT 4 1975

lic hearing. It will be considered as part of an historic district because, commission representatives say, "the district concept is legally stronger than single buildings and it makes the landmark more of an entity."

The proposed district includes the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. Those two historic sites have long enjoyed national landmark status but have never been similarly designated by the city.

'Remains In Jeopardy'

Preservationists have criticized the landmarks commission for taking so long to consider designating Pier A. "Until and unless BPC is publicly committed to leaving it alone," says one observer, "Pier A remains in jeopardy and the commission should treat it like an emergency. After all, state and federal officials acted quickly."

"The city is in an odd position of fooling around for years with an obvious landmark, since there's no significant controversy over its worth," this observer adds. "It's hard to argue with BPC not to tear down a building the city doesn't think enough of to designate. It's embarrassing."

The building of Pier A was initiated in the early 1870s by Civil War Gen. George B. McClellan, then engineer-in-chief of the city's Docks Dept. In 1918, the pointed-roof clock tower was added to the end of the pier as the nation's first permanent memorial to the World War I dead. It is one of the only two clocks on the East Coast

that peel the hours in ship's bells. The other is at the U.S. Naval Academy.

For years preservationists and maritime nostalgia buffs have been quietly arguing that the pier was rich in historic and visual importance and should be incorporated in the new city. But BPC was insistent on removing the pier, which officials argued interfered with a planned waterfront walkway and the lower floor views of the scheduled office towers. In exchange for eliminating the structure, BPC agreed to finance the construction of a new fireboat facility in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn.

BPC further agreed to remove the clock tower and underwrite the cost of relocating it on a site selected by the city. Efforts to place the tower at the South Street Seaport were blocked when the Seaport rejected the move. At the same time, Seaport officials joined with leaders of the Landmarks Conservancy and the Municipal Art Society to organize an effort to preserve the pier on its original site.

Although BPC has not officially altered its position on demolition, it has shown in recent months a new willingness to let the pier stand if the city releases it from contractual obligations, namely to finance the new fire department facility.

"The city has done nothing to amend our lease which requires demolition," a BPC spokesman says.

While it appears now that only bureaucratic technicalities stand in the way of a preservation solution, they are the kind of complicated technicalities that have defeated lesser projects. For one thing, there is some question whether the Fire Dept. is willing to continue using the pier. For another, it is doubtful, in view of the fiscal crisis, whether funds are available for the new Brooklyn facility or for conversion of the pier for public use.

When the BPC lease was first negotiated, Fire Dept. officials wanted to remain but circumstances have since changed. In anticipation of the forced move, the department has made changes in other facilities. Moreover, maritime activity has been continuously declining in Manhattan but increasing in

Brooklyn where the new station is to be located.

Thus, the city cannot even negotiate lease changes with BPC until it arrives at an agreement among its own agencies. Responsibility for that agreement rests with the Office of Lower Manhattan.

Claude Shostal, director of that office, says he hopes in the next few weeks to meet with representatives of the Fire Dept., Budget Bureau and Ports and Terminals to arrive at an agreement that would "at least take the pier off the endangered list."



...it's
Kosher
clean!

The Falls Chicken

INSPECTED
U.S.
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
EST. 1890

Falls Facility Corp. So. Fallsburg, N.Y. 12210